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ABSTRACT

Differences in social class and educational aspirations of pre- and postwar students of foreign languages are conjectured to have a significant bearing on currently declining enrollment figures in language instruction. Graphically illustrating the diversity of student-type and instructional objectives, the author discusses the necessity to develop programs which fill the needs of the individual. The relationship of instructional system characteristics, student characteristics, and behavioral goal characteristics is clarified with the frequent use of diagrams. (RL)

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NEW OBJECTIVES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING*

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally from the nineteenth century, students in foreign language classes had belonged to one social class, and their objectives were more or less identical; they wanted to acquire a reading knowledge of a language with a rich literature and prestigious culture. After the war, students came from various social classes and displayed various characteristics. Problems arose because all these students had to undergo identical training and learn the same tasks without consideration of their multiple differences in aptitude, goals, likes and dislikes. This paper purports to show graphically the importance of redefining objectives in FL teaching and adjusting them to individual needs.

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Much has been said recently about the FL curricula, against the "irrelevancy" of many FL programs and for the abolition of the FL requirements. Experiments of many kinds have been conducted, results have been reported, studies and statistical analyses have been published. Teaching methods have been compared, textbooks and other materials have been evaluated and rated, student aptitude and/or attitude tests have been devised and occasionally used, pretests and proficiency tests have been created and administered (Birkmaier 1968). And yet the onslaught

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*This is a slightly revised version of the welcome address delivered on May 17, 1969 to the First Annual HALT-HAVA Conference in Honolulu.

of the rising student rebellion has barely been avoided. Many American institutions of higher learning already have abdicated and renounced any FL requirements. Apparently all this feverish scientific or scholarly activity was insufficient. Somewhere a link was missing in the chain of communication between teachers and students or between these two groups at one end and the administration at the other end. To study a FL was declared salutary for the students either for humanistic goals or for practical reasons in a shrinking world. As soon as this declaration came out and was reinforced by the Sputnik panic, everybody increased his pace. The Congress, public and private schools, individuals, faithful to an old tradition in the French cavalry, did not know exactly where they were going but they went fast. Only after several years of this intensive and accelerated "run for life," a startling revelation dawned upon the most perceptive FL specialists: Clearly defined goals were lacking. No matter how attractive a teaching method, how qualified and dedicated a teacher, even the brightest and most conscientious student must know where he is supposed to go in order to start moving towards that goal. Just as an explorer chooses his path according to his final destination, the FL people will select appropriate materials, content or instructional methods according to the patterns of behavior they want the learner to be able to demonstrate when he or she has successfully completed the learning experience. And just as any explorer's final destination will be determined to a large extent by his basic interests and the luggage or equipment he has at his disposal, the student's

behavioral goal should depend on his personal characteristics. Unless the students are given what they need and what they can absorb, they will not be attracted to the foreign languages. In order to transform the students into enthusiastic adepts and amateurs of foreign languages and cultures, FL specialists and teachers' first task is to readjust their goals and to define them with greater accuracy.

Since a picture, a chart or any drawing may convey an idea much faster and with greater clarity, the purpose of the following figures is to illustrate some of the basic reasons why FL terminal behavior goals must be readjusted and redefined to reflect the needs of the students and to correspond to their aptitudes (Niedzielski 1968, 1970).

The first illustration (see Figure 1-A) gives us a general idea of how from a central source of light, source of knowledge, source of skills (the instructional system of which the teacher is a very important source), information radiates and is picked up by students who have varied characteristics (see Figure 1-B).

In turn students pick up this information, and carry it over all the way to the goals or objectives which have been assigned for a particular class, for a particular level (see Figure 1-C).

The more students we have, the more we find variety in the overall characteristics of the student population and, also the more complicated the entire teaching process becomes.

Figure 1-A

REACHING THE TARGET LANGUAGE

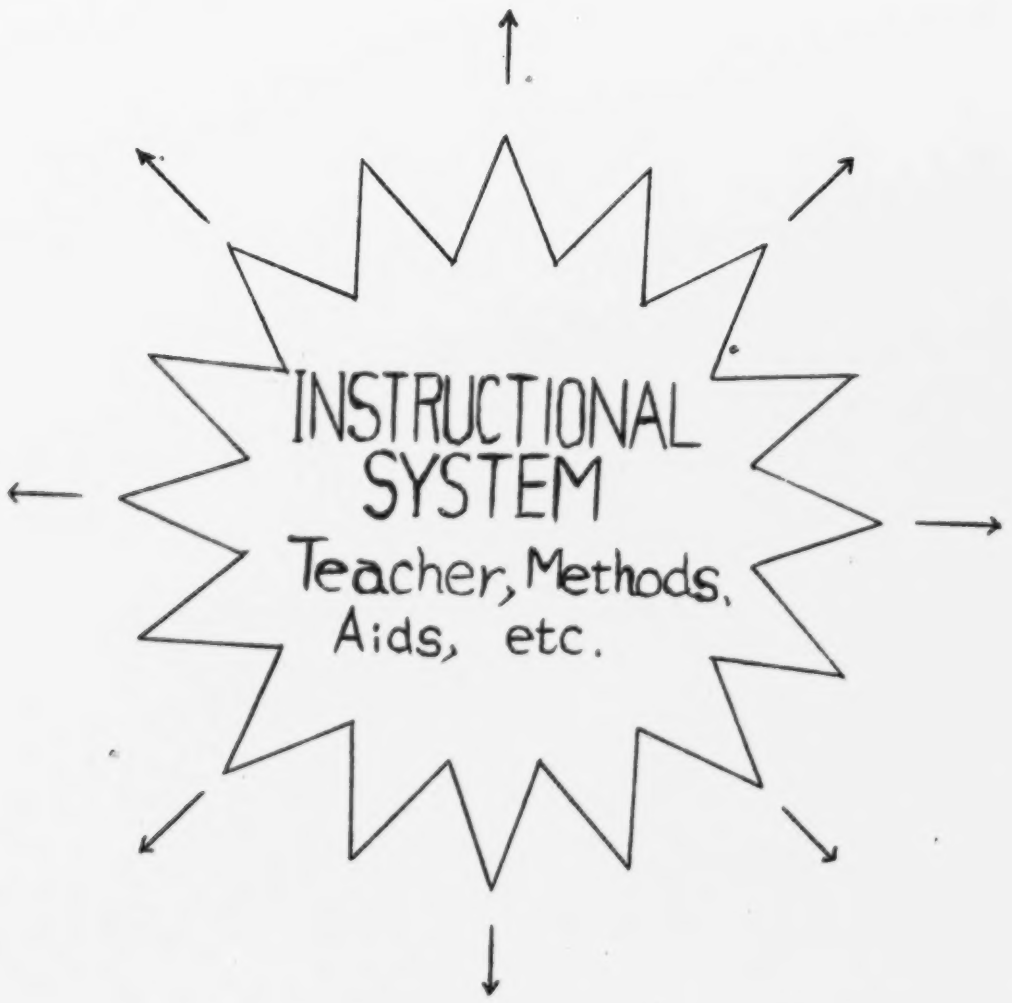


Figure 1-B

REACHING THE TARGET LANGUAGE

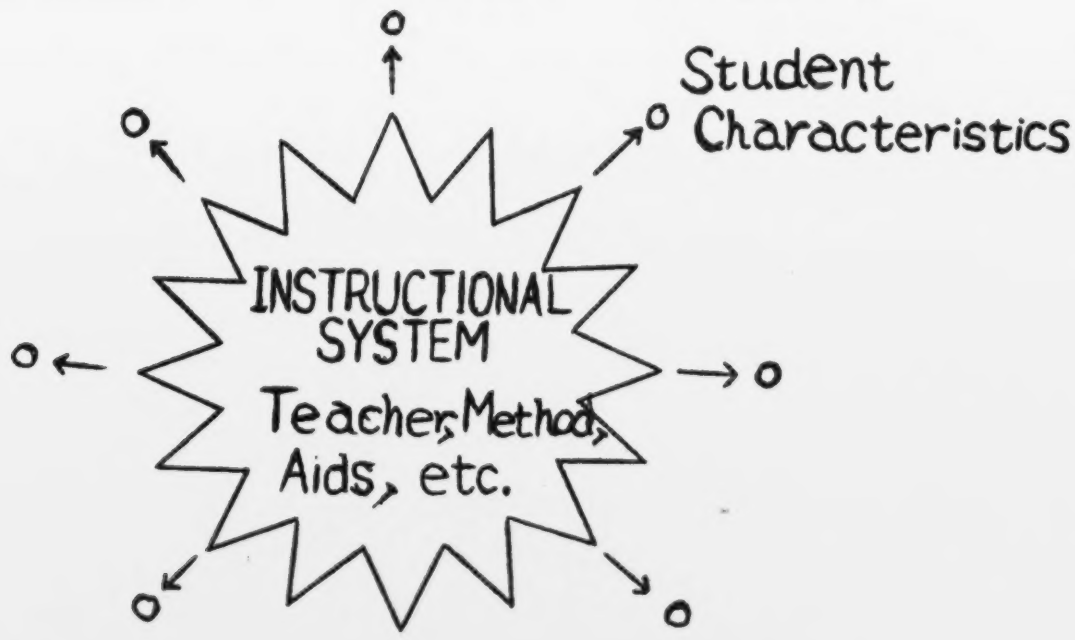
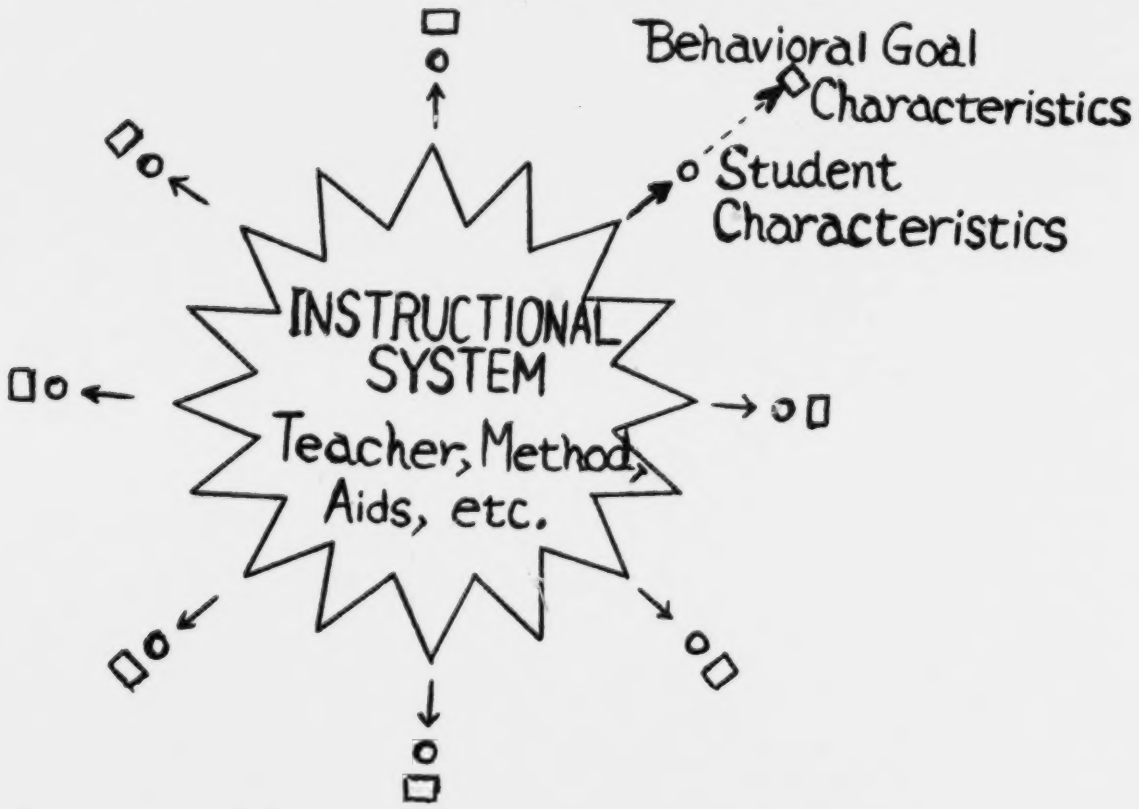


Figure 1-C

REACHING THE TARGET LANGUAGE



In 1900 only a few high school graduates attended colleges or universities. They all came from the upper middle class or the higher spheres of society; their objective was to be able to read nice books, good literature (see Figure 2-A). Look how easy it was then to reach the target (see Figure 2-B).

After the Second World War, partly because of accrued richness in the United States and partly thanks to numerous monetary aids such as the GI Bills, over 50 percent of high school graduates started attending college or universities. The majority of this huge student population is required to study a foreign language (see Figure 3-A).

Fortunately, the behavioral goal characteristics have been changed, for now we want our students to be able to communicate ideas in the foreign language. Therefore, at least four skills are tested at the end of the foreign language program.

The instructional system has been adapted to meet these new demands. And look how the objectives are reached (see Figure 3-B). Roughly two-thirds of the students miss the target. They either drop, fail or avoid by any means to take a foreign language. If they cannot avoid it and succeed in passing the FL requirement, they hurry to forget this painful and irrelevant subject as soon as they are out of it.

What can we do?

We have tried various things: audio-visual aids, self-instruction and lengthening of the exposure time, adopting longer and longer language sequences. All fine and dandy!

Figure 2-A

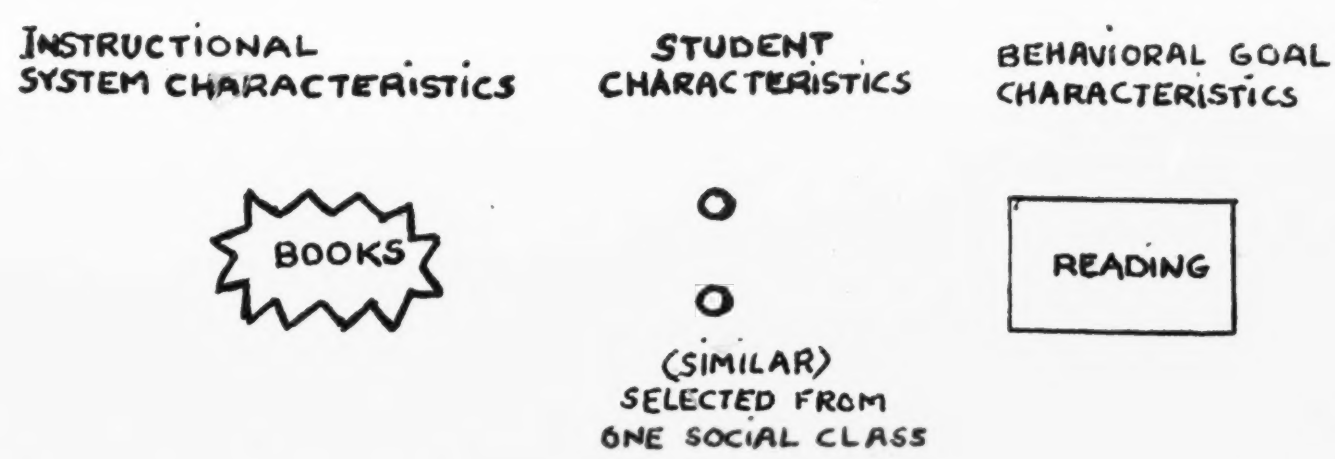


Figure 2-B

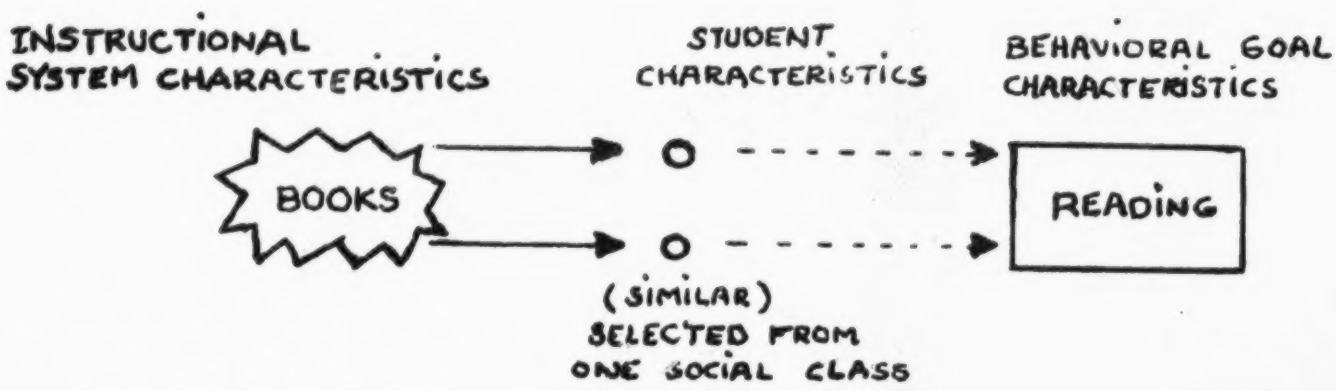


Figure 3-A

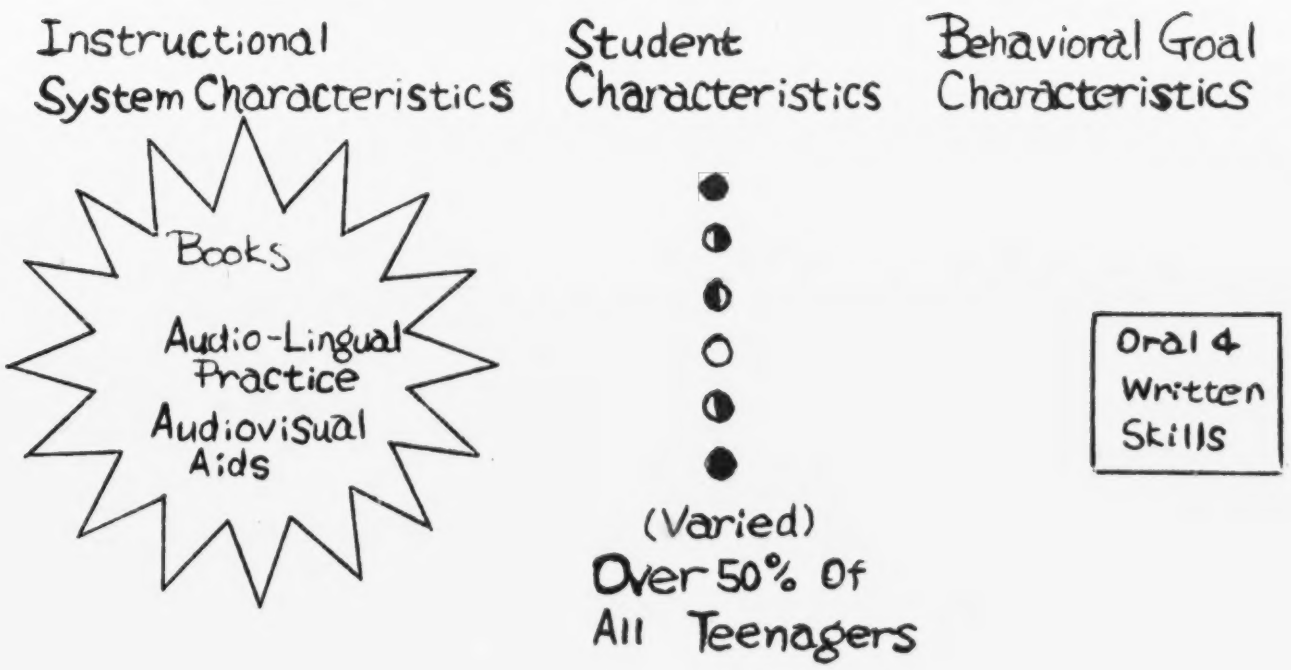
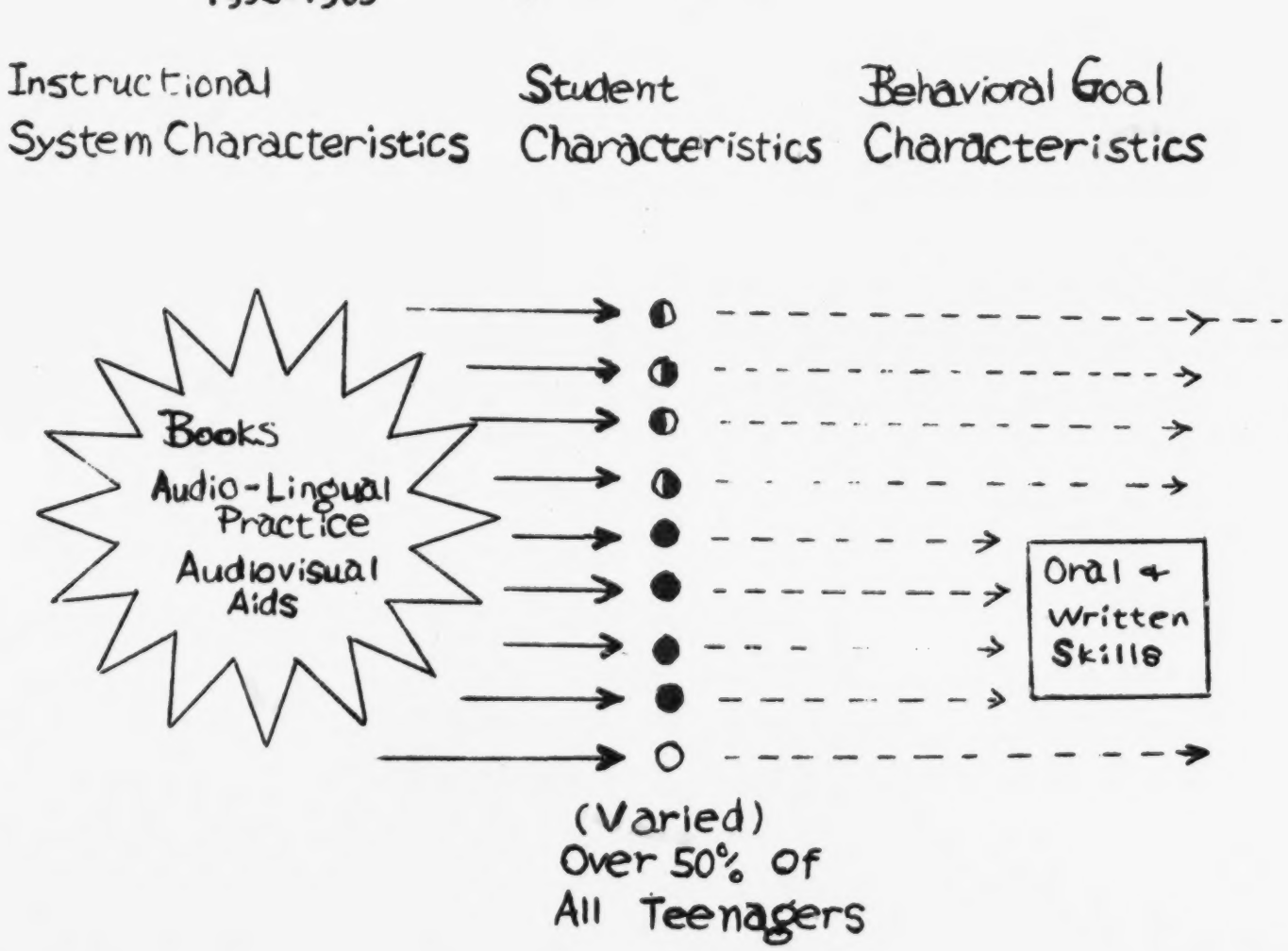


Figure 3-B



And I do hope we will continue in this direction but first of all we have to readjust our objectives, our behavioral goal characteristics.

The main differences between the FL instructional situation from 1950 to 1965 and the FL instructional situations proposed for the future are found: (See Figure 4-A)

1. In the instructional system characteristics which are enlarged and enriched with

1.1. more self-instructional materials. Students acquire theoretical knowledge and all practical bases outside of the classroom with short specialized linear or branching programs which drill definite elements of phonology, grammar, culture, even literature or other abstract aspects of the target language manifestations.

1.2. a considerable amount of role playing. Students are progressively brought to the point where in addition to speaking the language they really converse in it using appropriate kinesics, proxemics and other cultural behavior.

2. more importantly, in the behavioral goal characteristics where cultural studies are emphasized.

2.1. Students who for practical reasons prefer to learn how to converse in the foreign language will receive an adequate preparation for future touristic or professional travel.

2.2. The FL majors and those who want a solid linguistic background will be trained in all four skills.

2.3. Students who major in fields where they must read extensively foreign journals and therefore need the written skills more than the oral skills, students who have a low aptitude for oral skills, and students who already have a talent for writing in their native language will learn the written skills only and put them to use either in creative writing or in scientific summary writing in their own field.

2.4. Finally other options should be allowed the students. For instance, a semester spent studying in the foreign country or a two semester special project conducted in the native language about the foreign culture or any serious cross cultural studies and even a science or other non-literary subject taught in the foreign language could replace the acquisition of linguistic skills.*

What happens then? All our students relay the missile straight to the target. 100% hit. (See Figure 4-B)

No more frustration for teachers and for students;

No more complaining;

No more revolution;

No more committee meetings to decide whether or not to drop the FL requirement.

Instead, I do hope we will have committee meetings to determine the new behavioral goal characteristics.

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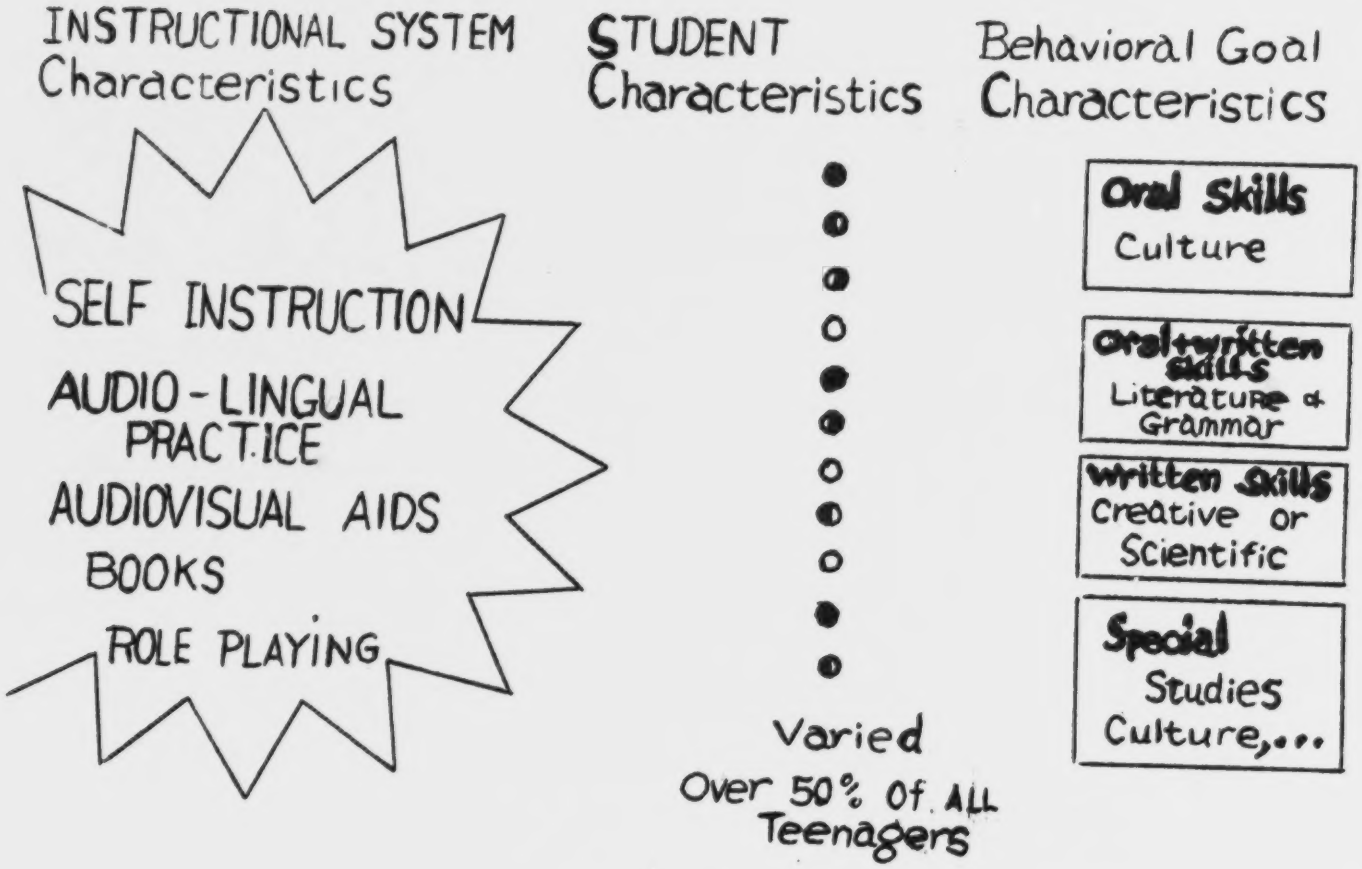
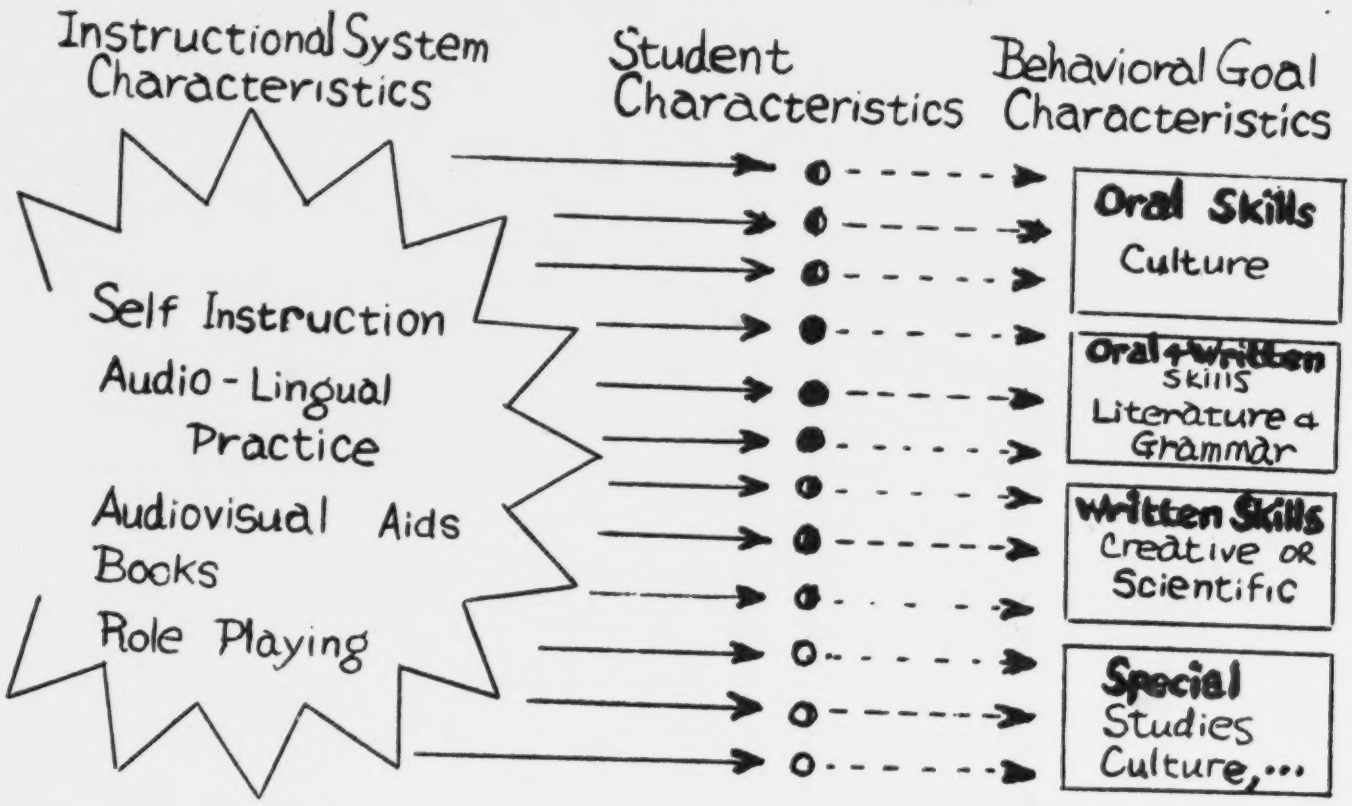
*The Faculty Senate of the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Hawaii passed a similar resolution on May 18, 1970.

1970-

Figure 4-A





1970-

Figure 4-B

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